

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

JOSHUA WALKER,

Plaintiff,

v.

CAMDEN COUNTY JAIL,

Defendant.

HONORABLE JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil Action

No. 16-cv-07044(JBS-AMD)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

Joshua Walker, Plaintiff Pro Se
1340 Everett Street
Camden, NJ 08104

SIMANDLE, District Judge:

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Joshua Walker seeks to bring a civil rights complaint pursuant to the 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Camden County Jail ("CCJ") for allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement. Complaint, Docket Entry 1. At this time, the Court must review the complaint to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. For the reasons set forth below, the Court concludes that the complaint will proceed in part.

II. BACKGROUND

The following factual allegations are taken from the complaint and are accepted for purposes of this screening only. The Court has made no findings as to the truth of Plaintiff's allegations.

Plaintiff alleges he endured unconstitutional conditions of confinement in CCJ was he was confined in the facility in June 2015, August 2015, and September 2015 to February 2016.

Complaint § III. His complaint states: "When I was in jail I was given a mat with no bunk that laid me to sleep on the floor with no wash cloth. They put me in 7 day lock down not send me to medical when I was shot in my left thigh and barely could walk and put me on the top tier so I had to walk up an[d] down the steps in so much pain. The nurse and correctional officer seen it and did nothing. I was in danger of getting an infection and experienced pain an[d] suffering." *Id.* He alleges "the guards in the jail do and say whatever they want to you and treat you as if you aren't even an individual or a human." *Id.* He seeks relief in the form of monetary compensation. *Id.* § V.

III. STANDARD OF REVIEW

A. Standards for a Sua Sponte Dismissal

Section 1915(e)(2) requires a court to review complaints prior to service in cases in which a plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*. The Court must *sua sponte* dismiss any claim that is frivolous, is malicious, fails to state a claim upon which

relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. This action is subject to *sua sponte* screening for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) because Plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*.

To survive *sua sponte* screening for failure to state a claim, the complaint must allege "sufficient factual matter" to show that the claim is facially plausible. *Fowler v. UPMS Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009) (citation omitted). "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Fair Wind Sailing, Inc. v. Dempster*, 764 F.3d 303, 308 n.3 (3d Cir. 2014) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678). "[A] pleading that offers 'labels or conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)).

B. Section 1983 Actions

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights,

privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress

28 U.S.C. § 1983. Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. See *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Malleus v. George*, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d Cir. 2011); *Piecknick v. Pennsylvania*, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994).

IV. DISCUSSION

Plaintiff alleges he experienced unconstitutional conditions of confinement and was denied medical care during his detention at CCJ.

A. Conditions of Pretrial Confinement

Plaintiff alleges he experienced unconstitutional conditions of confinement at CCJ due to overcrowding. "[U]nder the Due Process Clause, a detainee may not be punished prior to an adjudication of guilt in accordance with due process of law." *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 535 (1979). The mere fact that an individual is lodged temporarily in a cell with more persons than its intended design does not rise to the level of a constitutional violation. See *Carson v. Mulvihill*, 488 F. App'x

554, 560 (3d Cir. 2012) (“[M]ere double-bunking does not constitute punishment, because there is no ‘one man, one cell principle lurking in the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.’” (quoting *Bell*, 441 U.S. at 542)). Overcrowding leading to conditions that “cause inmates to endure such genuine privations and hardship over an extended period of time” and that “become excessive in relation to the purposes assigned to them” does constitute unconstitutional punishment, however. *Hubbard v. Taylor*, 538 F.3d 229, 233 (3d Cir. 2008) (internal citations and quotation marks omitted).

The claims against CCJ must be dismissed with prejudice because it is not a “state actor” within the meaning of § 1983. See *Crawford v. McMillian*, 660 F. App'x 113, 116 (3d Cir. 2016) (“[T]he prison is not an entity subject to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.”) (citing *Fischer v. Cahill*, 474 F.2d 991, 992 (3d Cir. 1973)); *Grabow v. Southern State Corr. Facility*, 726 F. Supp. 537, 538–39 (D.N.J. 1989) (correctional facility is not a “person” under § 1983). Construing the complaint liberally and giving Plaintiff the benefit of all reasonable inferences, he has sufficiently stated a claim for unconstitutional conditions of confinement against the unnamed “nurse and correctional officer” as they allegedly observed Plaintiff’s suffering from the gunshot wound that caused him difficulty walking. Specifically, he alleges that the overcrowded conditions led to

unsanitary conditions that placed him in risk of "getting an infection and experienced pain an[d] suffering." Considering the totality of the circumstances alleged by Plaintiff, the Court finds that he has sufficiently pled that he experienced unconstitutional conditions at CCJ. The claim shall therefore be permitted to proceed against the John Doe Nurse and Correctional Officer at CCJ.

B. Denial of Medical Care Claim

The complaint should also be reasonably construed as raising a denial of Medical Care Claim. Plaintiff alleges that while detained at the CCJ, he was denied medical care for a gunshot wound and sustained injuries due to the lack of medical treatment. Complaint § IV.

The Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment applies to pretrial detainees' claims of inadequate medical care. *Bocchino v. City of Atlantic City*, 179 F. Supp.3d 387, 403 (D.N.J. 2016). "[T]he Fourteenth Amendment in this context incorporates the protections of the Eighth Amendment" (*Holder v. Merline*, No. 05-1024, 2005 WL 1522130, at *3 (D.N.J. June 27, 2005) (citing *Simmons v. City of Philadelphia*, 947 F.2d 1042, 1067 (3d Cir. 1991), *cert. denied*, 503 U.S. 985 (1992))), and most cases have stated that, at a minimum, the Eighth Amendment's "deliberate indifference" standard will suffice. In other words, substantive due process rights are violated only

when the behavior of the government official is so egregious and outrageous that it "shocks the conscience." *A.M. ex rel. J.M.K. v. Luzerne Cnty. Juvenile Detention Ctr.*, 372 F.3d 572, 579 (3d Cir. 2004) (citing *County of Sacramento v. Lewis*, 523 U.S. 833, 846-47 (1998)).

Applying this principle in the context of a claim for violation of the right to adequate medical care, a pretrial detainee must allege the following two elements to set forth a cognizable cause of action: (1) a serious medical need; and (2) behavior on the part of prison officials that constitutes deliberate indifference to that need. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976); *Natale v. Camden Cnty. Corr. Facility*, 318 F.3d 575, 582 (3d Cir. 2003).

To satisfy the first prong of the *Estelle* inquiry, an inmate must demonstrate that his medical needs are serious. The Third Circuit has defined a serious medical need as: (1) "one that has been diagnosed by a physician as requiring treatment"; (2) "one that is so obvious that a lay person would recognize the necessity for a doctor's attention"; or (3) one for which "the denial of treatment would result in the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain" or "a life-long handicap or permanent loss." *Atkinson v. Taylor*, 316 F.3d 257, 272-73 (3d Cir. 2003) (internal quotations and citations omitted). When evaluating this first element under *Estelle*, courts consider factors such

as "the severity of the medical problems, the potential for harm if the medical care is denied or delayed and whether any such harm actually resulted from the lack of medical attention."

Maldonado v. Terhune, 28 F. Supp.2d 284, 289 (D.N.J. 1998).

The second element of the *Estelle* test is subjective and "requires an inmate to show that prison officials acted with deliberate indifference to his serious medical need." *Holder*, 2005 WL 1522130, at *4 (citing *Natale*, 318 F.3d at 582) (finding deliberate indifference requires proof that the official knew of and disregarded an excessive risk to inmate health or safety). Conduct that constitutes negligence does not rise to the level of deliberate indifference; rather, deliberate indifference is a "reckless disregard of a known risk of harm." *Holder*, 2005 WL 1522130, at *4 (citing *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 836 (1994)). Courts have found deliberate indifference "in situations where there was 'objective evidence that [a] plaintiff had serious need for medical care,' and prison officials ignored that evidence[,]" *Nicini v. Morra*, 212 F.3d 798, 815 n. 14 (3d Cir. 2000) [and] in situations where 'necessary medical treatment is delayed for non-medical reasons.' *Monmouth Cnty. Corr. Inst. Inmates v. Lanzaro*, 834 F.2d 326, 347 (3d Cir. 1987)[,] [cert. denied, 486 U.S. 1006 (1988)]." *Natale*, 318 F.3d at 582.

Here, Plaintiff's claim of lack of medical treatment for a gunshot wound could satisfy these two prongs required for his Medical Care Claim and the Court will allow this claim to proceed against the John Doe Nurse and Correctional Officer at CCJ. *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 106; *Natale*, 318 F.3d at 582.

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, Plaintiff's Complaint is dismissed in part and shall proceed in part. The complaint is dismissed with prejudice as to the CCJ and shall proceed on the due process claims and medical care claims against the John Doe Nurse and Correctional Officer at CCJ. It will be Plaintiff's obligation to supply the identities of the individual state actors whom he seeks to hold accountable for these claims.

An appropriate order follows.

October 19, 2017

Date

s/ Jerome B. Simandle

JEROME B. SIMANDLE

U.S. District Judge